

# Happy Man On Welfare

by

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Today, the main temptations for violation of one's identity are the opportunities for advancement in industrial society.

**Erich Fromm**

Zarathustra wants to be called a robber by the shepherds.

**Nietzsche**

No, no, I am not without employment at this stage of the voyage.

**Henry Thoreau**

Early in the Spring. From the top tier of the Heywood Park grandstands, rush hour. There they go, in their armored vehicles, along the ruts of tradition. Lean efficiency is the rule of business out in high-tech corporation-land, but inefficiency rules the gridlock. Mostly single drivers: more empty seats than filled in that rat race. These drivers survived the last decade's "work" debacle, to form a kind of (nervous) working elite. The excscinded dross of *Downsizing* and *Rationalization* continues to multiply, dispersed through every community around the globe. Now "marginalized," now (sigh) "unemployed," now "giving up their dignity." *Outplaced*. No one will enslave them any more for a crumb of the pie,

for the restaurant life, for the death terms, the SUV and the DVD and the ADHD and the PTSD. No longer safe in the Enframing, sterile halls, school corridors, bureaucratic cells.

The 1990s, and beyond that seventh wave - *tsunami*: Millennium. I am a literate tribal man in the extended margins. Parenthetical man, who cut through their ledger lines and escaped. It is a glorious Monday, says the sweep of my vision from the grandstands. There is unquestionable magic here - from here - about 8:30 AM in the morning of the year. In the sunshine they are building malls so that they can *live inside a TV*: sealed glass blocks, stores, factory items/icons in a glaze and gloss consumerama. I am outdoors, building a sunshine *weltanschauung* from scratch and confusion.

I'm on Welfare. Have been for a long time: a volunteer. In excellent physical shape (at 40), high IQ. Heavy reader, freelance moralist, I take full responsibility for my choice of income. I believe religiously that the world owes me a living.

Why you lazy bastard! Parasite! Bum!

Yes indeed, I am lazy. I take that catchall catcall as a compliment. And a *volunteer* bastard. I didn't ask for official permission. I did not want them to confer their "legitimacy" on *me*. Wilhelm Reich said, "don't ask for a license to embrace your loved one." I would add: don't ask for a license to be born. Parasite? Of course: we all "sit at another's table," animals, plants included: all present (sitting, standing, gesturing, swimming, flying) at the earth's round table. All contribute. Some say "grace." That is nature's design in ecosystems. But - can you really "parasite" on an abundance? I must take issue with "bum" though. To me, "bum" evokes the image of a scruffy character "bumming" dimes or quarters. I have nothing against such people. But my family members, my friends, and you if we meet on the avenue, are safe from my solicitations. You gave at the office - I am grateful.

What to do with *liberty* on limited income? How to work one's leisure? Well, I liked Irving Layton's discovery late in life that all he wanted to do was "make love and make poems." I'll tell you about my love life later on. Also, in the freedom of many seasons, I followed Henry Thoreau's wise advice: "rise free from care before the dawn and seek adventures."

Why don't I get off my ass? In this society, childhood was twelve years of enforced discipline among vast conscript clientele: public schools. Periodically in "adulthood" I held "jobs." For what, friends? For who? For whose social system? For whose economy? For whose code of ethics? For whose bottom line? For whose topped-up bank account? For what preacher to preach - to preach what? For what teacher to teach - to teach what? For what "democracy"? For what "free" enterprise? For whose "world wars"? For whose "freedom"?

So: I put my coat on and went outside. In the sun seasons, packed day-pack: thermos, mug, food, book to read (study), book to write, felt-tipped pen, audio player/recorder. I went mainly to the Heywood Park Grandstands, Beacon Hill,

A.J. Wood Bench (UVic), Fleming Beach Heaths, the West Bay Boardwalk, scrubland paths beside the Selkirk Waters, the seawall below Ross Bay Cemetery, the Cemetery itself, the beaches along Dallas Road, Stadacona Park Rose Garden, and, when the opportunity arose, to deeper wilderness. By bicycle I sought philosopher's benches in the morning sun, and set to. Already off the bottom rung of their "ladder of success," their devil a-slide down the snakes (yahoo!). Already under the "bottom line" through which I had chopped a hole. Might as well take it further: dug down among the corpses. Communed with the ancestors.

The Road Not Taken runs over there, obscured with salal, alder, protectful blackberry. Way back that way it emerges from a robust hoary tradition, the Western Humanist and Christian, far older than the "work ethic" of the Industrialists and their ideologues (Locke to Bentham) and their priests. It loops, makes an end-run round suburban sprawls and urban enframings, and you can see it if you cock your eyes right, just about here. A tradition of aristocracies out of which came most of our treasury of "art," music, literature: the high dreams, aspirations of the race projected, modeled.

What makes this choice of aristocracy unique is that it is rooted as tenaciously as roadside weeds in the vision of Democracy, and *its* path not taken: the dream of societies organized to nurture the development of individuals in their uniquenesses. This puts me at the top of the heap, as a free aristocrat, and off the bottom of the hierarchy, as not for sale.

Rush-hour. Rush-year, rush-century. Like the tribesman who lied down after his first car-ride to "let his soul catch up," I perch on the grandstands among crows and gulls in a light ecstasy and wait for mine. Then my soul goes for a flight and I have to wait for my body to catch up.

Quieter after a time. Distant muted roar of the hives. The homeless out in town I guess, I don't know where the rest of the unemployed are. A waft of fresh air tugs at my book.

I guess it was out of my own deep naïveté that I took the unacceptable road. How could I afford it? The most likely explanation was a moral deficiency. Somehow the delicately poised compass pointer of my social conscience had me tacking energetically against the *zeitgeist*.

I draw my knife: It turns out to be easy to cut that word, "work" from its main assumption, that which equates it with "job" (work that wants a *boss* to legitimize it. Work that wants *money* to certify it.)

Work  
Job

OK. Well separated. Word processing has revealed to me that the gap represented above is as wide or deep as you want. Put between the words a

thousand miles of forests and rivers, or the child at work on her treehouse.  
Second cut:

Leisure  
Laziness

Between these put Huck Finn's wide Mississippi. A hot summer day. Huck himself on a raft, barefoot, straw-hatted, lies back with his pipe and thinks what the blue sky thinks. "Laziness" and leisure are in love here, far from industry. And I am the thinking Huck. It is really the river that models archaic godlike laziness, so wide and leisurely it delivers the whole width of summer to the eye of the beholder. Withdraw from that bank an old dividend of leisure, a *leisure ethic*, that went under when the spirit of *industria* rose and bestrode the Western World.

What leisure ethic? Look to all of history's aristocrats, including Nature herself; the wild lion (endangered), yawning out on a high hot rock; old Pan himself, skirting the clear-cuts.

A man in his prime bare-chested, oversees an empty baseball diamond and a stand of oaks. Rides the grandstands through the welcoming benignity of a new season. Feels an old and deep intelligence (*Intelligere*: to choose between) shifting his tectonic plates. His soul!

I choose the free creative life. Not (this is crucial) fragments of "free time" in an overall context of indentured time. I wanted years in which to devote my "gifts," my talents, my enthusiasms, to projects that were not commanded by anybody but myself and my own spirit's promptings.

A dreamer among the pragmatists: I wanted to gaze at the stars (*Con-sidere*, to observe the stars). Consider:

### **Ten Good Reasons To Make A New Bid For Freedom In This Century**

1. R. Buckminster Fuller told the story of the 1955 meeting in Geneva of Soviet and American scientists to discuss possible peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Gerard Piel, publisher of *Scientific American* was quoted there as saying that it was in scientific evidence that *there could be not only enough of the living essentials to take care of everybody around the world at high standards of living, but that there also could be enough to take care of the increasing populations at ever-improving standards of living.*

2. Tiny article in the Victoria Times-Colonist out of Geneva (22/5/86): The International Labor Organization (ILO) announced after a study that *the world will have to create 47 million new jobs every year for the next 40 years... to overcome unemployment.*

3. The TC reported on January 12, 1988 that *the world was spending 1.8 million dollars a minute on armaments*.
4. Today in North America, says one source, there exists the technological equivalent of 400 “energy-slaves” per man, woman and child.
5. From history we learn we are 3 or 4 lifetimes over our heads in a “work (job) ethic” still dominant in media rhetoric, and a market ethos which is assumed. A “moralizing of the proletariat” initiated by the holders of economic power as the Industrial Revolution toolled up. They had a hell of a time getting peasants and artisans into brutal factories out of their immemorial rhythms of seasons and the old way of long leisure and occasional intense labor. A variety of unspeakable tortures impressed “duty” deeply into children. Peaked in the 19th century. John Fowles: “Duty largely consists of pretending that the trivial is critical.”
6. The profit motive as we know it was conspicuously absent over most of history. Unindustrialized people chose, if wages rose, not to work harder, but to take more time off. The Greeks didn’t have a word for what we call “work.” Their word was *a-skolia*, “non-leisure,” just as the Latin language had *neg-otium*. *Skola*, meaning “leisure” is the root of our word for “school.”
7. The idea of gain for gain’s sake was foreign to Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Medieval cultures, and mostly absent in the majority of Eastern civilizations. In the Middle Ages the church taught that “no Christian ought to be a merchant.” Early Capitalists were outcasts, bad guys. By 1700, the turn had come. Check out the origins of Calvinism - a tragic path of broken logic.
8. Family Systems psychology tells us that children “fantasy bond” to abusive parents: defend them: ergo, the “pride” of the worker in shameful work. Beholden to the company. A refusal to support the idea of a Basic Income Guarantee (“jobs, not handouts”). Piven & Cloward, from their book, *Regulating The Poor*: “When victims are induced to collaborate as victimizers, submission is assured.”
9. “Man as provider” came into Western collective consciousness in the last century: to have a working wife meant that a man was less than a man. Daniel Yankelovich did repeated surveys asking what was meant by a “real man.” Up to the late 1960s, in the US, an 85 to 90% majority defined a “real man” as someone who is a “good provider.” In 1968 the number was 86%, but had fallen to 67% a decade later. So the computer-age displaces, outplaces (liberates!) the robot’s servant. What is left to them, though, poor devils, when the vessel of their “manhood” is taken away? American mythos has a constant, ready answer: violence. Violence, the other proof, certificate, of manhood.
10. The job, says Piven and Cloward - “the main institution by which [people] are regulated and controlled.”

became the basic tool of social control.”

Control for what? you may freely inquire. To keep the rich rich (and “growing” richer), the poor poor, and the invidious comparison between the two alive. Why this setup and not something else? A dangerous question. What are the sources of greed in a world of plenty? Material for an answer, heavy with schooling, “socialization,” custom, culture, tips and falls into the Unconscious.

But Jung wrote that “everything unconscious is projected.”

Bertrand Russell said “the morality of work is the morality of slaves” - meaning the morality of the job. So did Nietzsche, who gave us the word *ressentiment*: the free-floating bitterness of the wage-slave and its tragic issue: “domestic violence,” public violence, all the other familiar gross international by-products.

A couple of hours has passed, judging by the sun. A little woman walks by with her little dog. She doesn’t look up at me<sup>1</sup>. This beautiful open park is my living room, the grandstands my sun-blistered, green-painted easy chair. A line of trees, newly green, are elders assuming the post of educators in a class of one. Precious hours of *skola*. I lay down my book, try once more to “get” what the trees seem to be trying to convey, from their timeless Buddhistic equanimity<sup>2</sup>.

“Man is the measure of all things.” Am I not a member of that species? Social safety nets were originally spread out to prevent food-riots, French Revolutions. The *accelerating-acceleration* curve of technological innovation climbs this century’s walls: breaks every “logic bubble,” both here and in the rumbling giants of the “Developing World.” “Externalized labor power” and “externalized rationale” multiplied a million-fold, dancing out and warring out humanity’s great Unconscious. And to the extent that we have suppressed or denied the implications of leisure: to that extent will its great projected god, Technology, wreak its revenge, its “thwarted love.”

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1 . Black coffee on green grandstands back of Heywood Park in the 7:30 to 8:30 hour on a superb spring Monday, hardly a soul about except for a geeky olady with her OK dog, she never acknowledged me up there on a high tier, ‘n she put sumpin’ in the garbage can, maybe dogshit-in-a-bag. A circle of 7 gulls precisely in the centre of the playing field like scruffy guys waiting at the door of a soup kitchen. Urbane scavengers at the worm-line, I figgered waitin for the early worms turning up when the sun warmed the earth through the heavy dew. High-fliers feeding on the deep-crawlers. I read a book, the latest by Al Toffler, and processed ideas, information more like a worm processes earth perhaps than a like a bird observes the layout of streets and fields.

2 . No lesson of chemistry is more impressive to me than this chemical fact that “nineteen-twentieths of the timber are drawn from the atmosphere.” We knew the root was sucking juices from the ground. But the top of the tree is also a tap-root thrust into the public pocket of the atmosphere. This is a highwayman, to be sure.

**Ralph Waldo Emerson**

I measure all things.

There is a surplus base in this world. It is my experiment to plant my seed, or nutshell of seeds, in this surplus base. The house of survival - *plenty* for all, there it stands. The door is open: our house, the gift, the premise/promise of the earth, its immanent physical principles. You do what you want. I'm going up to the summer fields. I'm going to follow up my interests, live out my hypothesis and my alluring long chances: scholarly, creative, erotic, *ludic*! I'm going to look out to sea, let my dreams drift down the sunsparkle trail. I'm going to consider a different face altogether of what is "important." I'm going out to *play* - over the whole earth!